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CONSUMER ALERT

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Plan Ahead for Hassle-Free Move

Spring is on the horizon and your thoughts may be on relocating to a new home. But before you start packing, do a little research to avoid moving headaches and save some money, says Tennessee Attorney General Paul G. Summers and Tennessee Division of Consumer Affairs Director Dave McCollum.

"There are a lot of factors to consider before moving," Attorney General Summers said. "A little advance planning goes a long way toward saving time, money and frustration."

One of the first things to consider is whether you plan to hire some one to move your belongings or whether you will do it yourself. You also need to determine how much stuff you have to move and how much time and money you have to spend on the relocation.

Attorney General Summers and Director McCollum offer the following tips:

If you decide to move yourself:

*Compare the price for truck rentals and determine whether a flat fee or charge per mile is more cost effective for your move. Will you be taking more than one trip in the truck?

*If you are moving long distance, you should take into consideration extra expenses such as time off from work, fuel, food, lodging and toll charges.

If you hire a professional:

*Check on any charges for interstate (state to state) moves, which are usually determined by weight, volume of moveables and distance of shipping.

*Get an estimate for moving expenses and make sure the estimate is binding (guaranteed by the mover prior to the move). Make sure to get the binding estimate in a contract.

*Have the contract guarantee how many hours the job will take and that there will be no or minimal overrun charges.

*Look the contract over carefully to ensure there are no other charges of which you are not aware. If there are any expected gratuities, make sure they are listed in the contract.

*Ask what kind of payment is acceptable. The company may not take personal checks.

*Check with state agencies (the Tennessee Division of Consumer Affairs, Better Business Bureau, etc.) to see if the company has any complaints against it, has a good on-time record and to ensure it is not a "fly by night."

*See if the company has any insurance policies and what is covered. If not, consider getting insurance to cover any breakage, loss, etc.

*Document all your inventory before you pack and keep extra copies.

*Confirm pick-up and delivery dates and times in writing.

*At the end of the move don't sign a release unless you've opened all of your boxes and inspected your furniture.

*Do not sign a paper that says that you have received all of your goods in good condition until you have had an opportunity to look through your things. (You can write onto the movers' form that you have not had time to look over your belongings.)

*Your mover is required to give you a copy of "Your Rights and Responsibilities When You Move" prepared by the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration (202-358-7061 or 202-358-7063.) <http://www.fmcsa.dot.gov/factsfigs/.htm>. It's free and has lots of detailed and helpful information.

*Also check out the website (www.moving.org) of the moving industry's trade association, the American Moving and Storage Association. It contains pre-move information, as well as detailed information for solving problems that might come up with your move.